SECRET EMPIRE™

NICK SPENCER • ANDREA SORRENTINO • ROD REIS

SECRET EMPIRE

LAS VEGAS, NEVADA.

AFTER THE BOMBS STOPPED FALLING, WE SEARCHED.

WE DUG THROUGH THE RUBBLE AND PULLED OUT WHATEVER WE COULD FIND.

THE EMPIRE DIDN'T MIND. THEY ALLOWED IT--

--BECAUSE THEY KNEW WE WOULD NEVER FIND WHAT WE WERE LOOKING FOR.

A FEW SURVIVED.

BUT IT WASN'T ENOUGH.

AFTER ALL, WHAT WE WERE REALLY SEARCHING FOR WAS HOPE...

...AND THERE WAS NONE TO BE FOUND.

HE HAS TO DIE.

SECRET EMPIRE

A Cosmic Cube transformed Steve Rogers, Captain America, into the ultimate Hydra sleeper agent--and after months of scheming and manipulation, the country is now under Hydra's control. Inhumans are closely monitored, and mutants have been relocated to a homeland in New Tian. Earth's most powerful heroes are stranded beyond Earth's Planetary Defense Shield, at the mercy of a Chitauri Invasion--or trapped inside the Darkforce bubble that envelops New York City.

The handful of heroes that remain are trying to oppose Captain America's regime from a hidden base just outside Las Vegas. But after they rescued a young man carrying crucial intel stolen by Rick Jones, Captain America retaliated, sending Hydra warships to annihilate the city...
and ordering Rick's execution.

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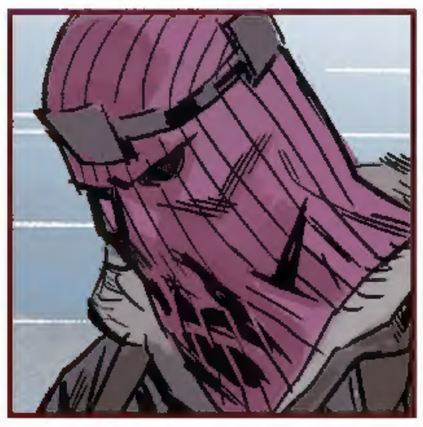
Hydra Command

Captain America



Baron Zemo

Deceased

Rick Jones

Darkforce New York

Defenders

Luke Cage

Jessica Jones

Iron Fist

Cloak

Dagger

Claire Temple

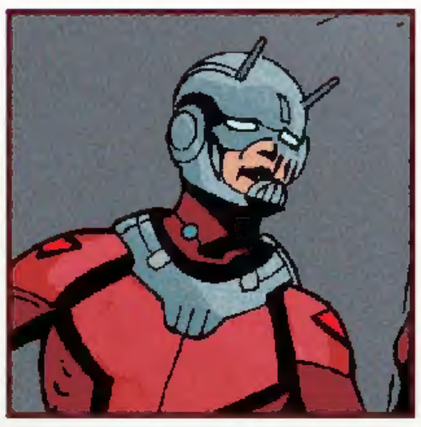
Kingpin

The Underground

Black Widow

Hawkeye

Tony Stark (A.I.)

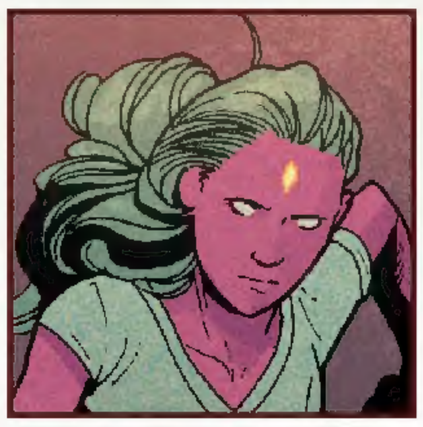


Ant-Man

Hulk (Amadeus Cho)

Wasp

Spider-Man



Viv Vision

Ironheart

Falcon

Hercules

Quicksilver

Mockingbird

DID YOU FIND IT?

I'M *LOOKING,* GIVE ME A SECOND.

FINE, BUT HURRY--LIGHTS COME BACK ON, YOU AND ME GOTTA HAUL ASS OUTTA HERE.

I'M TRYING-- I BARELY GOT A LOOK THROUGH THE WINDOW.

THIS WOULD BE A LOT EASIER IF YOU COULD STILL MAKE ONE OF THOSE MAGIC FIREBALL THINGS--

WELL, WHAT CAN I SAY? MY CHI DOESN'T GET GREAT RECEPTION IN HERE.

WHOA, HOLD ON, I THINK I FOUND THE DOOR--

BETTER HAVE. LIGHTS ARE GONNA BE BACK ON ANY...

NEW YORK CITY.

...MINUTE.

THAT'S NOT A DOOR.

YOU *KNOW* THIS IS ALL DOCTOR STRANGE'S FAULT, RIGHT?!

WHAT ARE YOU *TALKING* ABOUT, LUKE?

IT'S WHAT THEY *DO*--MAGIC GUYS, I MEAN. GIANT DEMON SHOWS UP, THEY SAY "OOH, SEND IT TO THE DARKFORCE DIMENSION," THEY DO THEIR SPELLAMAJIG, AND THERE WE GO. PROBLEM SOLVED.

EXCEPT--

EXCEPT NOW *WE* GOTTA LIVE IN THE DARKFORCE DIMENSION, TOO.

MAYBE NOT FOR MUCH--*NN*--LONGER--

OH, FOR GOD'S SAKE...

YOU LOSERS REALIZE WE'RE ON A CLOCK, RIGHT?

COME ON--

"--THE DOCTOR'S WAITING."

=SIGH= FINALLY. YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO BE BACK AN HOUR AGO, JESS.

SUPPOSED TO BE *LIGHT OUT* AN HOUR AGO.

AND THERE WAS A SERIOUS LINE AT THE PHARMACY.

WERE YOU ABLE TO GET EVERYTHING?

MOST OF IT--

WHAT ABOUT CIPRO?

NO DICE. LOOTERS MUST'VE BEAT US TO IT.

DAMN IT...

I'VE GOT A FULL WING OF PATIENTS IN HERE WITH TYPHOID FROM WATER SUPPLY CONTAMINATION, I'VE GOT A HEP-A OUTBREAK THANKS TO THE POOR SANITATION--

AND NOW--

--I DON'T EVEN HAVE ANY ANTIBIOTICS.

IT'LL BE OKAY, CLAIRE. WE JUST HAVE TO HOLD ON--

HOW LONG? LOOK AT US--

"--NO POWER, NO COMMUNICATION WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD--

"--RUNNING OUT OF FOOD AND DRINKABLE WATER--

MARKET

Water

"--CROWDED TOGETHER IN THE WORST CONDITIONS--"

--AND THOSE ARE THE *GOOD* HOURS--THE REST OF THE TIME WE'RE LIVING IN PITCH-BLACK DARKNESS. A HEARTBEAT AWAY FROM IT ENVELOPING US COMPLETELY.

SPEAKING OF THAT HEARTBEAT, HOW *IS* PATIENT NUMBER ONE, ANYWAY?

"HOW IS *DAGGER* HOLDING UP?"

SKRETCH MIRACLE

BE STRONG, TANDY...JUST A BIT MORE...

"SHE'S THE ONLY SOURCE OF LIGHT FOR THE ENTIRE ISLAND OF MANHATTAN. WITHOUT HER, EVERY SINGLE ONE OF US WOULD BE DEAD AND DEVOURED BY THOSE-- *THINGS* OUT THERE..."

PROBLEM IS, COUNTERACTING THE DARKFORCE IS--WELL, IT'S GONNA *KILL* HER. WHEN SHE STARTED THIS, SHE COULD DO IT FOR TEN, SOMETIMES EVEN TWELVE HOURS A DAY--

NOW WE'RE LUCKY IF WE GET *FOUR.* THE PHYSICAL DEMANDS ARE ONE THING, BUT MENTALLY--

--IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE SHE BREAKS.

WELL, DON'T BE TOO PESSIMISTIC, DOC. THE HELL THAT'S BROKEN LOOSE OUT THERE RIGHT NOW, SHE MIGHT OUTLAST US ALL.

CITY'S FALLING APART. THERE'S ONLY ONE PERSON WHO SEEMS TO KNOW HOW TO KEEP THINGS TOGETHER--

"--AND WE CAN'T LET HIM DO IT."

WHERE ARE THEY?!

COME ON--WE *KNOW* YOU'VE GOT THE MEDS!

PLEASE-- I TOLD YOU--THEY DIDN'T COME THIS WEEK-- THEY SAID THEY DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH--

YOU'RE LYING! GIVE 'EM UP NOW-- WE DON'T WANNA HAVE TO HURT ANYBODY!

WELL, YES, OF COURSE.

FEW OF US EVER *WANT* TO.

AT TIMES, HOWEVER, IT IS A MATTER OF *NECESSITY*. AND IN THESE DARK DAYS--

--THE NEED IS SOMETIMES GREATER THAN EVER.

M-MR. FISK-- WHAT ARE YOU--

I HAVE WATCHED MEN TURN INTO BLOODTHIRSTY SAVAGES OVER A LOAF OF BREAD. WATCHED MY CITY BURN TO THE GROUND AS WOMEN AND CHILDREN CRY OUT. BUT IN THE FACE OF ALL THAT--

--I TRY NOT TO *JUDGE*. IN FACT, I RECOGNIZE THAT MANY OF THESE ACTS SIMPLY REPRESENT THE NATURAL ORDER, MADE CLEARER NOW THAT SO MUCH ARTIFICE HAS BEEN STRUCK FROM OUR LIVES.

BLAMING MEN FOR THE THINGS THEY DO IS NO MORE RATIONAL THAN BLAMING THE LION AS HE TEARS INTO THE ANTELOPE'S FLESH.

LOOK, I-- CAN *EXPLAIN*-- THEY GET DRUG SHIPMENTS, SEE? FROM MERCY HOSPITAL.

WE WERE GONNA PAY YOU OUR TAXES ON IT, WE JUST WANTED TO TURN 'EM AROUND REAL QUICK--

"WANTED." HM. YOU SEE, THAT IS A VERY DIFFERENT THING ENTIRELY. AFTER ALL, THERE IS WHAT YOU *WANT*--

--AND THERE IS WHAT YOU *NEED.*

NOW--I UNDERSTAND SOME ***PROMISES*** WERE MADE TO YOU FINE PEOPLE...

THEY WERE MADE BY SOME WITH GOOD INTENTIONS, PERHAPS, BUT NOT THE ***RESOLVE*** TO SEE THEM THROUGH.

I WILL ***NOT*** FAIL YOU AS THEY DID.

AND I WILL ***NOT*** LEAVE YOU AT THE MERCY OF MEN LIKE THESE.

THIS CHURCH WILL FALL UNDER MY PROTECTION. AND FOOD, MEDICINE, SUPPLIES--YOU WILL WANT FOR NONE OF IT. ALL I ASK IN RETURN IS THIS...

...ON THE DAY WHEN WE SEE THE SUN AGAIN, YOU REMEMBER--

--IT WAS ***WILSON FISK*** WHO KEPT YOU SAFE.

THE MOUNT.

IN THE ABSENCE OF HOPE, BROKEN AS WE WERE--

--THIS WAS THE TURNING POINT.

CHOICES WERE ABOUT TO BE MADE.

AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES WOULD NEVER BE FORGOTTEN.

IT WAS THE DAY TWO OF US STOOD, AND TWO PATHS WERE LAID OUT.

A FAMILIAR STORY, BUT SOMEHOW DIFFERENT THIS TIME.

ONE WAS LIGHT.

BLAM!

AND THE OTHER WAS DARKNESS.

WE DO NOT HAVE TIME TO *MOURN.*

WE DO NOT HAVE TIME TO BE *ANGRY.*

"WE ONLY HAVE THE TIME TO *ACT.*"

I AM LOOKING FOR A TEAM OF VOLUNTEERS FOR THE MISSION WE *ALL* KNOW WE HAVE TO UNDERTAKE.

"WE'RE CALLED *AVENGERS,* AND THESE PEOPLE--THAT CITY--DEMAND *VENGEANCE.*"

THE MAN WHO *KILLED* THEM MUST ANSWER FOR WHAT HE'S DONE HERE.

"NO MORE GAMES. THIS TIME WE DON'T SHOOT TO WOUND."

WE WILL CUT THE HEAD OFF THIS BEAST AND TAKE OUR CHANCES WITH WHAT GROWS IN ITS PLACE. WE HAVE NO OTHER CHOICE LEFT--

ACTUALLY--

--MAYBE WE DO.

NO, TONY. NOT NOW. THIS IS NOT THE TIME FOR ONE OF YOUR DRUNKEN EPISODES--

I AM ACTUALLY FRIGHTENINGLY LUCID AT THE MOMENT, NAT.

BUT LOOK, I--I DO GET WHY A LOT OF YOU MIGHT NOT TRUST ME, OR--WANT TO HEAR WHAT I HAVE TO SAY.

SO WITH THAT IN MIND, I'D LIKE TO GIVE THE FLOOR TO A SPECIAL GUEST. OUR OLD PAL--

--RICK JONES.

UH, HEY EVERYBODY--

--IF YOU'RE GETTING THIS MESSAGE, LET'S BE HONEST--THERE'S A GOOD CHANCE I'VE BEEN MADE DEAD. AND YEAH, THAT ***SUCKS.***

SEE--I'M RECORDING THIS FROM SOME SUPER-SECRET HYDRA HOLDING FACILITY.

IT'S ACTUALLY NOT THAT BAD. EXCEPTIONAL BLU-RAY LIBRARY, MEMORY FOAM MATTRESSES WITH TEMPERATURE CONTROL, AN ESPRESSO MACHINE, BUT--THAT'S NOT THE POINT.

THE ***POINT*** IS, I JUST TOOK ADVANTAGE OF MY STAY HERE--

--AND HACKED INTO HYDRA'S TOP-CLEARANCE-LEVEL DATABASE. THEY'RE NOT GONNA BE TOO HAPPY ABOUT THAT, OBVIOUSLY, BUT ***YOU GUYS*** WILL BE. YOU KNOW WHY?

BECAUSE I FOUND SOMETHING THAT IS GONNA BLOW THIS SCENE WIDE OPEN. SOMETHING THAT IS GONNA CHANGE EVERYTHING. SEE--

--I KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO ***CAPTAIN AMERICA.***

YOU READY FOR THIS?

"IT WAS THE COSMIC CUBE.

"TO BE MORE SPECIFIC ABOUT IT, IT WAS THE RECONSTITUTED COSMIC CUBE FRAGMENTS THAT MARIA HILL USED TO MAKE THAT WEIRD SUPER-VILLAIN PRISON CALLED *PLEASANT HILL.*

welcome t
PLEASAN
HILL

"AND YEAH, YOU MIGHT REMEMBER--THAT WASN'T JUST ***ANY*** CUBE. IT BECAME ***KOBIK***--ACTUALLY SENTIENT, AND RUNNING AROUND ACTING LIKE A LITTLE KID.

"BUT WHAT HILL ***DIDN'T*** KNOW IS THAT KOBIK HAD ALREADY MADE FRIENDS WITH--*DUN DUN DUHHH*--THE RED SKULL.

"AND ***HE*** CONVINCED THE KID THAT HYDRA WAS THE BEST THING SINCE *FROZEN.*

"SO WHEN SHE SAVED CAP DURING THE WHOLE ***STANDOFF*** THING, SHE DIDN'T JUST MAKE HIM YOUNG AGAIN--

"SHE MADE HIM ***HYDRA.***

"SHE COMPLETELY REWROTE REALITY--HIS LIFE EXPERIENCES, HIS BELIEFS--***EVERYTHING,*** RIGHT DOWN TO THE DNA. SHE MADE HIM THEIR ***PERFECT SOLDIER.***

"A LITTLE TOO PERFECT, MAYBE. HE ENDED UP TURNING ON THE SKULL BECAUSE HE FELT LIKE SHMIDT WASN'T KEEPING IT ***REAL*** ENOUGH--

"--AND HATCHED HIS ***OWN*** PLAN FOR WORLD DOMINATION.

"A PLAN THAT INCLUDED CAPTURING KOBIK--AND ***KILLING*** HIS BEST FRIEND, BUCKY--THEN TURNING HER BACK INTO NON-KID FRAGMENTS.

"HE WAS PLANNING TO USE THE CUBE TO HYDRA-FY ALL REALITY, AND IT WOULD'VE WORKED, TOO--

"--IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR THAT MEDDLING OLD GUY.

"ERIK SELVIG WAS THE S.H.I.E.L.D. SCIENTIST THAT 'RAISED' KOBIK--AND HE WAS ALSO SECRETLY HYDRA. (I KNOW. WHO ISN'T, RIGHT?)

"TURNS OUT HE'D GOTTEN REALLY ATTACHED TO THE KID, THOUGH, AND WANTED TO SEE HER LIVE. SO HE SCATTERED THE FRAGMENTS TO KEEP THEM FROM CAP--"

--WHICH MEANS THEY'RE OUT THERE SOMEWHERE.

I'VE ATTACHED EVERYTHING I'VE GOT-- ALL THE HYDRA FILES ON THE COSMIC CUBE, SELVIG'S JOURNALS, *ALL* THEIR INTEL.

THEY'RE LOOKING HIGH AND LOW FOR THESE THINGS-- WHICH MEANS *YOU* NEED TO FIND THEM FIRST. YOU CAN--

73%

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

OPEN UP IN THERE!

upload complete

UH-OH. OKAY, I GOTTA RUN. LISTEN, AVENGERS-- I KNOW THINGS ARE AS BAD AS THEY'VE EVER BEEN--AND AFTER ALL WE'VE BEEN THROUGH, MAYBE YOU DON'T THINK YOU CAN *DO* THIS, BUT--

--I STILL BELIEVE IN YOU, YOU HEAR ME? *I'M* NOT GIVING UP, SO NEITHER CAN YOU. I STILL HAVE IT--YOU KNOW WHAT IT IS?

BOOM

HE'S GOT A PHONE!

IT'S THE ONE THING NOBODY CAN EVER *TAKE* FROM YOU, OKAY?! YOU CAN ONLY LOSE IT YOURSELF--

--SO DON'T LOSE HOPE! =SKRRT!!=

I LOOKED AT THE FILES. THEY'RE THE REAL DEAL.

TONY, THIS... THESE CUBE FRAGMENTS-- DO YOU HAVE A WAY TO *FIND* THEM?

WELL, NO--I MEAN, NOT YET. BUT I HAVE SOME THEORIES.

BUT IF YOU DID FIND THEM, YOU COULD USE THEM? TO *FIX* HIM?

AH... IN THEORY?

UNBELIEVABLE.

YOU TWO CANNOT BE *SERIOUS.*

NAT-- YOU HEARD RICK--

RICK IS DEAD!

A CITY WAS JUST WIPED OFF THE MAP--AND THOSE DEATHS ARE ON US! ***ALL*** OF THEM. BECAUSE WE WEREN'T WILLING TO DO WHAT WAS ***NECESSARY.***

NOW YOU WANT TO DRESS UP AND GO PLAY ***SUPER HERO*** AGAIN? EVEN AFTER ***THIS?***

NATASHA, THIS COULD WORK...

OH, COULD IT, TONY? YOU OF ALL PEOPLE--I THOUGHT YOU'D GIVEN UP ON THIS NONSENSE. HOW MANY HAVE WE LOST CHASING DOWN THE CHANCE HE MIGHT BE A SKRULL OR AN LMD?

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE THEY SENT US BAIT JUST LIKE THIS, AND WATCHED HAPPILY WHILE WE MARCHED OURSELVES TO THE SLAUGHTER IN RETURN?

THIS IS JUST ANOTHER ***FAKE.*** JUST ANOTHER TRAP TO KEEP US ***RUNNING IN CIRCLES.***

THE RULES HAVE CHANGED. THIS IS A ***WAR*** NOW. YOU DON'T HAVE THE LUXURY OF HOPE ANYMORE. NOW IT'S HIM, OR THEM.

NO, NAT--I'M SORRY, BUT YOU'RE WRONG. WE DON'T ***KILL.*** IF STEVE--OUR STEVE--WERE HERE, HE WOULD BE THE FIRST TELL YOU--

THE ***HELL*** HE WOULD!

IF THAT MAN KNEW THAT HE WAS BEING USED LIKE THIS--IF HE ***KNEW*** HIS LIFE WAS COSTING EVEN ***ONE*** PERSON THEIRS, LET ALONE ***MILLIONS--***

--THEN HE WOULD ***BEG*** US TO KILL HIM. AND IF YOU DON'T GET THAT?

THEN YOU DIDN'T KNOW HIM AT ALL.

"IT IS THE MOST TERRIBLE PRICE, THE ONE PAID IN BLOOD--"

--SO WE COME HERE TO HONOR THE DEAD. BOTH THOSE WHO FOUGHT AGAINST US AND THOSE WHO WERE CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE.

OF WHICH THERE WERE ***FAR*** TOO MANY.

NO ONE EVER SAID THIS ROAD WOULD BE EASY--AND ON DAYS AS TERRIBLE AS THIS, SOME MAY FIND THEMSELVES QUESTIONING THEIR OWN RESOLVE...

...BUT IT IS ONLY THROUGH ***STRENGTH*** THAT WAR IS AVERTED. IT IS ONLY THROUGH ***ORDER*** THAT VIOLENCE IS QUELLED.

IF WE ARE TO ***TRULY*** HONOR THEIR SACRIFICE, WE MUST DO SO BY PRESSING FORWARD, CONTINUE TO BUILD ON EVERYTHING WE HAVE TO ESTABLISH A MORE POWERFUL, MORE SECURE NATION--

IT WAS A FINE SPEECH.

CCN NEWS

STEVE ROGERS' SPEECH IN MEMORY OF THE VICTIMS

HELMUT--

THE PEOPLE ARE IN MOURNING, BUT THE STREETS ARE QUIET. YOUR WORDS DID THAT.

HM. OR MAYBE THEY'RE JUST WORRIED ***THEIR*** CITY WILL BE NEXT.

WELL, IF THAT IS THE CASE--

--THEN IT ONLY PROVES YOU MADE THE RIGHT DECISION IN THE FIRST PLACE.

EXCEPT I DIDN'T, DID I? THE WHOLE THING IS A LIE. I DIDN'T ORDER THE ATTACK. I COULDN'T BRING MYSELF TO...

I ONLY GAVE ***ELISA*** THE POWER TO DO IT--

--THEN CHOSE TO LOOK THE OTHER WAY.

A SECRET THAT WILL DIE WITH THE THREE OF US. I KNOW YOU BELIEVE YOURSELF TO BE WEAK FOR THIS, STEVEN, BUT I DISAGREE--

OH?

THIS IS YOUR ***STRENGTH.*** YOUR DEVOTION AND FAITH IN THOSE YOU LOVE IS RETURNED TO YOU. IT IS THE SIGN OF A BORN LEADER.

ALLOW US ***BELOW*** TO DO WHAT IS NECESSARY, SO THAT YOU CAN BE THE SYMBOL WE NEED. WE WILL DEAL WITH THE ***BLOOD***--YOU BUILD THE ***BETTER WORLD.***

BESIDES, LOOK AROUND YOU--IT WORKED. YOU HAVE QUELLED THE DISSENSION ON THE HIGH COUNCIL--THEY FEAR YOU NOW MORE THAN EVER. AND SURELY THIS WILL BE THE END OF THE UNDERGROUND. NO ONE WILL EVER OPEN THEIR DOORS TO THEM AGAIN.

MAYBE--BUT STILL, IT WASN'T SUPPOSED TO BE LIKE THIS...THERE WAS ANOTHER WAY--

THE COSMIC CUBE.

IF SELVIG HADN'T--

--DENIED YOU YOUR DESTINY.

DENIED BOTH OF US. I CAN FIX ALL THIS--FIX ***EVERYTHING***--BRING BACK THE DEAD, RESTORE THE WORLD THAT ***WAS***--

--BUT THAT'S WHY I NEED ***YOU,*** OLD FRIEND.

YOU HAVE A MISSION FOR ME, THEN?

I DO. I NEED YOU TO FIND THOSE FRAGMENTS, ZEMO.

"SEARCH FAR AND WIDE.

"LEAVE NO STONE UNTURNED.

"RETRIEVE WHAT IS RIGHTFULLY OURS--"

--WHATEVER THE COST.

SO, ARE WE GONNA TALK?

BEATS THE ALTERNATIVE.

I'M SORRY FOR HOW THAT WENT DOWN IN THERE--

--AND I'M SORRY FOR AGREEING WITH TONY. YOU KNOW HOW ***PAINFUL*** THAT IS FOR ME.

HH. MIGHT ALSO BE YOUR FIRST HINT THAT YOU'RE WRONG.

YOU KNOW WHAT? MAYBE I AM, NAT--

--MAYBE THINGS ***HAVE*** CHANGED, AND I'M JUST TOO STUBBORN TO ADMIT IT...

MAYBE ALL THOSE PEOPLE ***ARE*** DEAD BECAUSE OF ME.

CLINT...I DIDN'T--I DIDN'T MEAN IT LIKE THAT. YOU'VE DONE MORE TO SAVE LIVES HERE THAN ANY OF US--

THAT'S NOT TRUE. I DIDN'T DO THAT MYSELF--YOU WERE THERE, TOO. EVERY STEP OF THE WAY.

I KNOW THIS IS WHO YOU THINK YOU ARE--THE TRAINED KILLER. THE PERSON WHO CROSSES THAT LINE--

--BUT I'VE SEEN THE REST OF YOU. YOU'RE ***MORE*** THAN THAT. YOU HAVE BEEN FOR A ***LONG*** TIME. IT'S JUST GOTTEN HARDER FOR YOU TO REMEMBER THAT SINCE--WELL--DAMN IT--

SINCE BUCKY DIED.

YOU'RE ONE TO TALK-- DO YOU REALLY THINK YOU'D BE DRAWING SUCH A LINE IN THE SAND--

YOU MEAN IF I HADN'T KILLED BRUCE.

LISTEN--WHATEVER THIS IS BETWEEN US--MAYBE IT'S A RELAPSE, MAYBE WE'RE JUST REALLY INTO MAKING THE SAME MISTAKE OVER AND OVER, BUT...IF I MEAN ***ANYTHING*** TO YOU...

...GIVE THIS ONE MORE CHANCE.

YOU SAID THAT THE LAST TIME.

I KNOW, I KNOW--

AND WHILE YOU'RE HUNTING FOR CUBE FRAGMENTS, HOW MANY ***MORE*** CITIES WILL HE RAZE?

BUT IF THERE'S ANY CHANCE--

--AT ALL--

--TO DO THIS THE RIGHT WAY, TO SAVE HIM--

THERE WILL ALWAYS BE SOME CHANCE. SOME CRAZY SCHEME TO KEEP YOU FROM FACING REALITY. ANSWER ME THIS--

--CAN YOU REALLY LOOK ME IN THE EYE AND TELL ME THAT IF IT DOESN'T WORK THIS TIME, YOU'LL GIVE THIS UP AND DO IT MY WAY? CAN YOU ***PROMISE*** YOU'D SAY NO NEXT TIME?

...

I CAN'T HELP WHO I AM, NAT.

I KNOW.

WHAT?

NAH, IT'S JUST--FOR A SECOND THERE, I THOUGHT YOU PULLED THE OLD SEDATIVE-IN-THE-LIPSTICK STUNT ON ME.

OH, CLINT...

...YOU KNOW I RESPECT YOU TOO MUCH FOR THAT.

I'M GLAD WE KEEP MAKING THE SAME MISTAKE.

HRRN... NAT?

@#$!

RAZ, HAND ME THAT THING.

THIS?

YOU KNOW, PEOPLE USUALLY DESCRIBE WHAT THEY'RE LOOKING FOR--

EH, YOU GUESSED IT.

TONY!

WE HAVE A PROBLEM.

JUST THE ONE?

IT'S NAT-- SHE'S GONE.

"GONE" AS IN...GROCERY RUN?

"GONE" AS IN, "IN THE WIND."

CAN WE--

COME ON. SHE'S THE *BLACK WIDOW.* NONE OF US IS GONNA FIND HER--

--UNLESS SHE *WANTS* TO BE FOUND.

OKAY. JUST MEANS WE HAVE TO WORK FASTER.

DOES THAT MEAN YOU GOT SOMETHING? YOU FOUND A WAY TO TRACK THE CUBE FRAGMENTS?

OF COURSE I DID, LOOK WHO YOU'RE ASKING.

AND NOT ONLY THAT, BUT I PUT THE CALL OUT TO FIND OUT WHO WAS UP FOR BRINGING THEM HOME.

MEET OUR VOLUNTEERS.

HOW COULD HERCULES REFUSE A *QUEST?!* A GRAND AND GLORIOUS QUEST, LIKE IN THE OLD AGES! MY FRIENDS, THIS WILL BE *MAGNIFICENT!*

OR A *SUICIDE* MISSION. ALSO THAT.

IF THAT IS WHAT IS NECESSARY TO RESCUE MY SISTER, ANT-MAN, THEN SO BE IT.

AND YES, I'LL BE BABYSITTING. YOU'RE WELCOME.

GOOD TEAM, RIGHT?

IT'S A START. BUT I'M ASSUMING SELVIG PROBABLY WASN'T DUMB ENOUGH TO SCATTER THE FRAGMENTS IN HYDRA TERRITORY--

--WHICH MEANS WE'RE GONNA NEED TO GET OUT OF THE COUNTRY.

UH-- HEY, FELLAS? IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR SOME HELP ON THAT FRONT--

--I MIGHT KNOW A GUY.

24 HOURS LATER.
COLORADO.

THAT'S THE PROBLEM WITH THESE OLD HOUSES--

--CRAWLING WITH SPIDERS.

UH, YOUR CODENAME IS *BLACK WIDOW.*

I DIDN'T GET TO PICK IT. WHY ARE YOU HERE, SPIDER-MAN? TO STOP ME?

NO. I DON'T HAVE TO--

--I ALREADY KNOW YOU WON'T DO IT.

OH? IS THAT A FACT?

YEAH, ACTUALLY, IT IS. THERE WAS A VISION OF THE FUTURE, REMEMBER? EVERYBODY SAW IT--

"--*I'M* THE ONE WHO KILLS CAPTAIN AMERICA."

AH...SO YOU'RE NOT HERE TO CAPTURE ME--YOU THINK YOU'RE HERE TO *HELP* ME.

ALL I KNOW IS I'M TIRED OF TRYING TO RUN AWAY FROM THIS. WHATEVER IS GONNA HAPPEN, LET'S JUST GET IT OVER WITH.

I SEE.

NO.

"NO"? WHAT DO YOU MEAN, "NO"?

IT MEANS WHAT IT ALWAYS MEANS.

I DON'T NEED A SIDEKICK.

WHAT IF THERE IS MORE THAN ONE?

YOU *DID* SAY YOU NEEDED A *TEAM.*

HH. THE LITTLE *REVOLUTIONARIES.*

AND YOU--ALL OF YOU--YOU'RE WILLING TO GET BLOOD ON YOUR HANDS NOW?

NOBODY IS SAYING ANYTHING ABOUT *KILLING* ANYONE. BUT WHERE SPIDEY GOES--

--WE ALL GO.

TO THE END, HOMIE.

VERY WELL THEN, CHILDREN--

--WELCOME TO THE *RED ROOM.*

MONTANA.

SCOTT, THIS PLACE--

YEAH, I KNOW. A REAL "YOU WILL NEVER FIND A MORE WRETCHED HIVE OF SCUM AND VILLAINY" VIBE TO IT. BUT, ON THE *PLUS* SIDE--DOLLAR DRAFTS.

THESE PEOPLE ARE FILTHY AND *UNSHAVEN.* HOW COULD THEY POSSIBLY BE OF USE TO US?

HEY, THEY MAY NOT *LOOK* LIKE MUCH, PIETRO, BUT THIS IS ACTUALLY THE HUB FOR UNDERGROUND ACTIVITY ON THE NORTHERN BORDER.

THESE ARE THE FELLAS YOU GO TO WHEN YOU NEED WEAPONS OR CREDENTIALS, NO QUESTIONS ASKED, OR WHEN YOU NEED SOMETHING SMUGGLED OUT OF THE COUNTRY--

--YOU KNOW, LIKE *US.*

A *LOT* OF PEOPLE MAKE THAT PROMISE, SCOTT. BUT BORDER SECURITY BEING WHAT IT IS NOW, YOU REALLY THINK YOUR CONTACT CAN PULL IT OFF?

HE'S MORE THAN A CONTACT, TONY. WHEN I NEEDED TO GET MY DAUGHTER CASSIE OUT OF THE COUNTRY, HE CAME THROUGH *BIG*-TIME. HE KNOWS WHAT HE'S DOING, TRUST ME.

AND YOU'RE SURE WE CAN TRUST *HIM?*

PRETTY SURE--

--I MEAN, HE DID USED TO BE *CAPTAIN AMERICA,* AFTER ALL.

HEY, SAM.

AW, NO--

--WHAT THE HELL DO *YOU* PEOPLE WANT?!

THEY SAID THEY WERE LOOKING FOR ESCAPE, BUT THE TRUTH IS, THEY WERE STILL SEARCHING FOR THE SAME THING...

HOPE.

A REASON TO KEEP BELIEVING.

TO KEEP FIGHTING.

MAYBE IT WAS JUST LIKE RICK JONES HAD SAID-- THAT THEY CAN NEVER TAKE IT FROM YOU, YOU CAN ONLY LOSE IT--

--BUT EITHER WAY, IT HAD FELT SO FAR GONE, FOR SO LONG.

SO DEEPLY BURIED UNDER THE GUILT AND THE REGRET AND THE PAIN.

UNDER THE *FEAR.*

WE HAD SEARCHED THE WORLD AROUND US.

WE HAD SEARCHED INSIDE *OURSELVES--*

--AND STILL WE CAME UP EMPTY. SO OFTEN AND SO COMPLETELY WE NEARLY GAVE UP.

BUT THAT'S THE THING ABOUT HOPE. JUST WHEN YOU'RE AT YOUR END--

--SOMETIMES YOU FIND IT IN THE STRANGEST PLACES.

W-WHO *ARE* YOU?! WHAT DO YOU WANT?!

MY NAME IS *STEVE ROGERS.*

IM JUST TRYING TO GET HOME.

TO BE CONTINUED!

Secret Empire

May

Captain America: Steve Rogers #17

In Cap we trust!

Captain America: Sam Wilson #22

Sam Wilson flies again!

Deadpool #31

Steve Rogers' red right hand has a job to do...

Beyond the Shield

Ultimates² #7

Will Galactus help the stranded heroes?

The Mighty Captain Marvel #5

Outnumbered & outgunned, Captain Marvel fights to keep hope alive!

Secret Empire

May

Secret Warriors #1

Quake assembles the next generation of Inhumans to take on Steve Rogers!

Secret Warriors #2

U.S.Avengers #6

Cap wants S.H.I.E.L.D.--and Roberto Da Costa is in his way.

Darkforce New York

Doctor Strange #21

Can the Sorcerer Supreme protect a city besieged by dark forces?

SECRET EMPIRE

NEXT

UNDER CONSTANT ATTACK FROM WAVE AFTER WAVE OF INVADING CHITAURI ALIENS, CAPTAIN MARVEL AND THE DEEP-SPACE TASK FORCE UNDER HER COMMAND ARE WAGING A WAR OF ATTRITION--ONE THEY MAY NOT BE ABLE TO SURVIVE!

SECRET EMPIRE: UPRISING #1

BLACK WIDOW LEADS THE NEXT GENERATION OF HEROES ON A MISSION THAT WILL CHALLENGE EVERYTHING THEY BELIEVE IN. WELCOME TO THE NEW RED ROOM.

ZONE